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SUBJECT: NIMROZ GOVERNOR SEEKS PRT AND A VISIT BY AMBASSADOR

¶1. (SBU) Summary: During a courtesy call, Governor Ghulam Dastagir Azad and Ambassador Eikenberry discussed possible political implications and logistical requirements of a possible visit to Nimroz and the Governor's desire for a PRT in order to bring more reconstruction assistance. Later that week, PRT Counselor, ISAF POLAD, and ISAF Stabilization Rear Admiral Borsum met with IDLG Deputy Barna Karimi and Governor Azad to discuss the Governor's interest in a possible PRT and the security and political implications of the recent move of Delaram district from Farah back to Nimroz. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) When queried on Iranian President Ahmadinejad's possible reaction to a visit by the Ambassador to Nimroz, Azad replied that Afghanistan is a sovereign country and that he would be a good host. The Ambassador agreed, and affirmed the Secretary of Defense's commitment to be supportive of an eventual PRT in Nimroz, probably one led by a non-U.S. ISAF/NATO partner. The Ambassador underscored that, while a non-U.S. led PRT might more pragmatic given the 223 km Iranian border with Nimroz, we consider Afghanistan a sovereign country and as such we base our actions on Afghanistan's preferences, not those of its neighbors.

¶3. (SBU) Azad offered an overview of Nimroz, but prefaced it by saying that the Iranian people oppose Ahmadinejad and that any accusations of intervention by the U.S. and the United Kingdom is simply an attempt by his government to survive and place culpability on the West. Azad said only 100 km of the 212 km border with Pakistan is secured by Afghan Border Police (ABP). There is no ABP presence on the remaining length of the Pakistan border and the entire length of the Iranian border. Azad said that bad security in neighboring Helmand and Farah provinces affect Nimroz.

¶4. (U) The Governor enumerated four major problems in his province: Taliban, al-Qaida, narcotics traffickers from Helmand transiting through Nimroz, and the presence of Iranian and Pakistani intelligence officers. He said the people of Nimroz support the government, which improves security. The only exception, he said, is Khasharod district, which is a safehaven for insurgents who are not welcomed in other districts of the province. According to Azad, the Khasharod people are mainly from the Noorzai tribe, which has traditionally been supportive of the Taliban. Khasharod is also the only poppy-producing district. Nimroz is 99 percent Sunni and one percent Shia, which is comprised mostly of Hazara refugees returning from Iran. Azad also described a long history of fighting against Arabs going back more than 1200 years.

¶5. (SBU) Azad lamented that only Nimroz and Dai Kundi (in central Afghanistan) are not supported by PRTs. Additionally, although there are some non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Nimroz, Azad said there is little reconstruction being done in Nimroz, and even Iran had turned

its focus to Herat after building some roads and electrical generators and a customs building in Nimroz four years ago. Azad added that Iran no longer helps Nimroz, but rather interferes by sending books with propaganda. When pressed, Azad admitted that he had not talked to any other country about opening a PRT in Nimroz. He noted that it appears to Afghans that the worse the security, the more assistance a province receives, citing Helmand, which is receiving millions of dollars. He said the people of Nimroz see this on television or hear it on the radio and wonder what they did wrong. The Ambassador acknowledged this was a problem.

¶6. (U) Azad offered possible points of economic potential in Nimroz. First, he said the Kamalhan Dam should be completed, only 47 percent was completed during the Soviet occupation. He also described the province as agriculturally rich, but hampered by a lack of water and developed irrigation systems. He said many people complain that the United States and the International Community are ignoring Nimroz, and they believe that conditions will improve when a PRT brings assistance and reconstruction money for the province. The big difference between Nimroz and other provinces, according to Azad, is a high level of education. Without offering concrete data, he said that there are schools for girls and boys alike, and that women sometimes drive. He characterized the people of the province as supportive of democracy and stability. For this reason, he said, the province is perfect for reconstruction and development.

¶7. (SBU) The Ambassador promised to consider a trip to Zaranj, the capital of Nimroz, after the elections. Azad enumerated several possible ways to there. The landing strip

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there can support both fixed wing and rotary craft, and is only about 10 minutes from the Governor's compound. The Afghan commercial airline Pamir flies to Zaranj from Kabul twice per week. The road from Deleram - newly paved by the Indians - requires a two hour drive, while the ride 190 km ride from Farah city to Zaranj is about five hours by car on the unpaved road. The Ambassador suggested that we might look for opportunities for historical restoration projects in the province using the Ambassador's Fund.

¶8. (SBU) During a meeting later the same week between Governor Azad, Deputy IDLG Director Barna Karimi, PRT Counselor, ISAF Stabilization Chief Rear Admiral Borsboom, and ISAF POLAD, the Governor requested a PRT. He said that if the close proximity of Zaranj to Iran proved too political, he would recommend placing a PRT in Khasharod, pointing out it has existing infrastructure, electricity, and is only an hour from the capital on the paved road. Azad expressed his expectation that security in Khasharod and Delaram would improve with a PRT, as would reconstruction funding. Azad said development and reconstruction assistance for the province would be needed for housing, employment, education and health for refugees flowing in from Iran. He also reiterated that completion of the Kamalhan Dam and development of canals would be a priority for Nimroz citizens. Borsboom emphasized that the first step into Nimroz for the coalition will be the biggest step, and suggested that a minimum amount of security - either ANA or ISAF - would be required before a PRT could be created. Azad noted that in a meeting earlier that week, Minister of Defense Wardak had promised an ANA kandak for Nimroz (there is no ANA presence in the province currently), but had not given a timeline. Borsboom suggested that the creation of a PRT should be connected to MOD plans for the first kandak, and that aligning the entities would build mass and momentum for the first step into Nimroz.

¶9. (SBU) RADM Borsboom told Azad that the RC-South Commander would like to meet to discuss elections and development issues that arose as a result of the June transfer of Delaram district from Farah Province (in RC-West) to Nimroz. Azad responded that since Delaram had been part of Nimroz during

the last election, those who voted previously hold registration cards saying "Nimroz," and the IEC has made arrangements for new registrants to vote for the presidential and provincial council candidates in Nimroz. He expressed confidence that no new registrants would be disenfranchised by their registration in Farah. Azad reported that campaigning in the province has started, and that there are 31 candidates (including five women) competing for nine provincial council seats.

¶10. (SBU) The POLAD noted that a meeting between Azad and the RC-South Commander could help bring Nimroz into the broader stability strategy for Afghanistan as a whole. Borsboom acknowledged that the administrative transfer of Delaram from Farah complicates planned Commander's Emergency Response Program (CERP) projects, and stressed that creativity would be necessary. Barna Karimi agreed to coordinate first steps in Kabul.

¶11. (U) Biographical note: Azad reported that he graduated from the medical faculty in Nimroz University in 1987 (1356) and became a refugee only three years later. He worked for many years as a doctor for UNHCR. He has been the Governor of Nimroz for five years.
EIKENBERRY